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Dangers to Detente

For conspiracy-minded officials in the Kremlin, this has been a trying week. They have found their carefully nurtured detente with the United States under intense attack from two seemingly disparate quarters—the Communist Chinese and conservative Americans. As a further complication, the rightwing politician, Ronald Reagan, has been going about chiding Chinese as well as Russians, even to the point of demanding that the former visit Washington for a change. Was this deliberately misleading, or was Mr. Reagan really adopting the formula that his enemy's enemy was his enemy, too?

Before Americanologists at the Kremlin get too mired in this puzzle, we would remind them that a U. S. presidential year is upon us. Surely they will remember John Kennedy's "missile gap" charge that General-President Eisenhower was undercutting U. S. defenses. If the so-called liberals could lodge such a complaint against a fairly middle-of-the-road Republican administration, then Russians should understand that there is nothing to prevent so-called conservatives from doing the same.

Rather than track election-year squiggles, Kremlin authorities would be better advised to look to the longterm implications of their own current policies. Henry Kissinger, with his personal investment in detente, may be forebearing when the Russians exploit civil war in Ango-

la, encourage Syrian intransigence in the Middle East, move naval forces into the Persian Gulf-Indian Ocean area, build up their ground forces and engage in strategic arms developments that mock the intent of the SALT I accord. But Mr. Kissinger is not likely to be Secretary of State beyond President Ford's present term. His successor may very well be a hard-liner by nature, or he may be prodded into such a stance if Moscow's provocations cause the American public to sour on detente.

It may be a matter of debate among Americans whether the Soviet Union has literally been in violation of the SALT I accords. Mr. Ford says no; Mr. Reagan says yes. But if the Russians probed deeply they would find there are increasing U. S. suspicions that they are violating the spirit of the treaty by pressing its ambiguities to the limit, and perhaps marginally beyond the limits. If this suspicion evolves into a massive opposition to detente because of aggressive Russian policies worldwide, Kremlin authorities will get little comfort in blaming American politics. The "missile gap" affair suggests the United States would respond by racing ahead in strategic arms and loosening the trade and technological ties the Soviet Union desperately needs to offset its economic failures. This would hardly be the legacy Soviet party chief Brezhnev has wanted to leave his country.